



The Digital Shadow of Death: Archiving Community-Based Memory in a Sound Archive

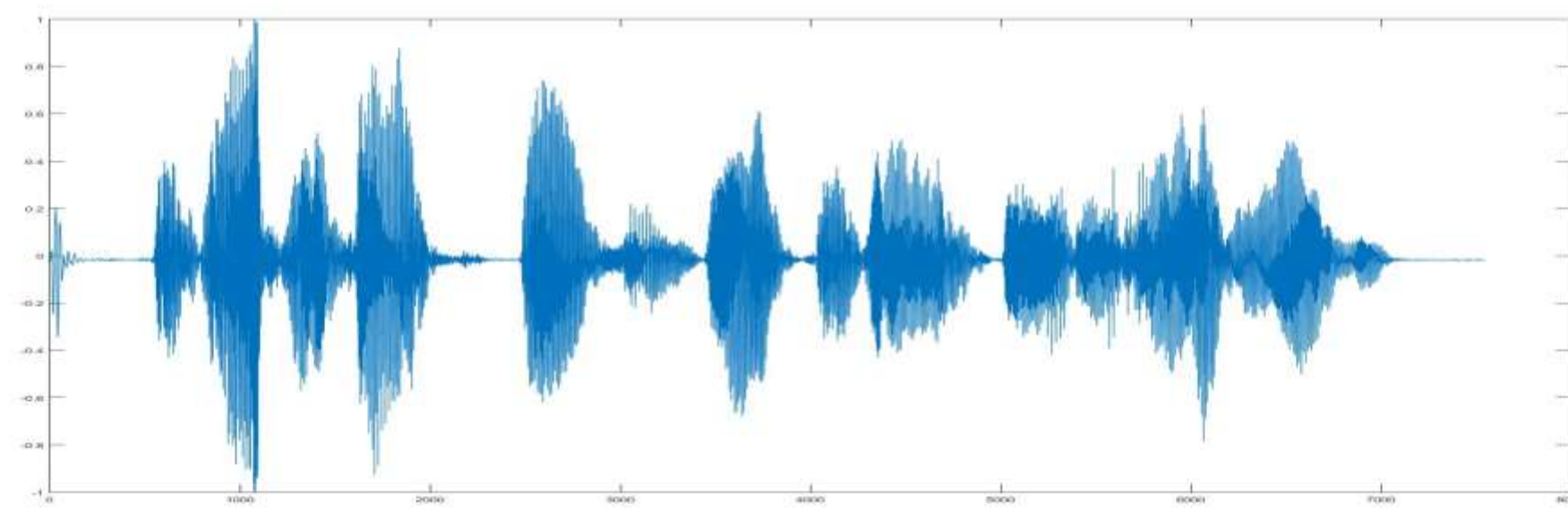
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Introduction

Sound archive is a space of neutral materiality . Cylinders, 78 rpm discs, spool tapes and similar obsolete technologies of sound recording exist in their digital formats locked in expansive hard disk space, tagged and substantiated with metadata sheets. The data from the carrier is condensed into information in an archive. But is that all that we may learn from an audio artifact?



The digital object is born naked and only attains its identity when attributed with the lineament of supporting document. However, existing metadata structures fail to incorporate the performative gestures of which music is born. The significance of such a disposition is also subscribed to parameters generated of memory. Consequently, the archive becomes a mechanical reproduction of the instruments generated of collective memory.



“Imagine a Bhimsen Joshi or a Dagar brother’s body torsions, or Nusrat’s facial contortions and convulsions that supplement their magnificently modulated voices. It looks as if the writhing of the body constitutes the rhythm of the sound, as if the “pleasure” of the sound unfolds through the pain of the body. (Rao, pp. 80 – 81)



The space of an archive is consistently characterised by the presence of nostalgia. As narratives provenly aid recall of memory, when users of the archive narrate a specific anecdote wrt understanding of a recorded song-text , the oral histories need to be accommodated as an extended metadata to a digitized audio file.

Conclusion

Anybody associated with the archiving of performing arts would know that a large pool of data regarding a collection is actually stored in folklore that is held within the archival community. Metadata must device a scheme to incorporate such layers of experience from which the recorded song travels to the act of archiving. When the digital archive is born as a counter to the inhospitability of the present to the past, then let the future be adequately equipped to explore remembrance of things past.



Literature Cited

1. Rao, D. Venkat. *Cultures of Memory in South Asia: Orality, Literacy and the Problem of Inheritance*. Springer, 2014.

Acknowledgments

Archive of North Indian Classical Music at School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India